

A LECTURE

ON

Freemasonry

BY A LATE MASTER OF No. 20,

ON THE GRAND REGISTER OF IRELAND.

KINGSTON:

PRINTED AT THE DAILY NEWS OFFICE,
1874.

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A. J. MORTIMER

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LECTURE.

I will endeavor to lay before you a few brief remarks, relative to our most Ancient and Illustrious Institution—Freemasonry; and, having the honor to be a member of it for more than twenty years, I am anxiously desirous of contributing my feeble aid, though merely “a widow’s mite,” to promote the dissemination of its pure and benevolent principles, for I feel convinced that if they were developed and understood, the weakness and absurdity of the objections usually brought against it, would be exposed and consequently, the objections themselves would be finally removed.

Are we asked then, What is Freemasonry? I think it may be defined as a Mystic Science, in which, under apt Figures, choice Emblems, and select numbers, solemn and important truths, naturally tending to improve the intellectual powers, rectify the heart, and unite the human race more closely together, are expressly contained; though it derives its name from speculative, and its insignia or badges from operative Architecture, yet it comprises the whole circle of Arts and Science, had been the depot of learning in former ages, and a focus combining every ray of genius in all climes of the earth, so that in some countries a Masonic Lodge was eminently called an Academy, and Freemasonry considered synonymous with Geometry, a science relating to the measurement of the earth, and emphatically referring to its creation.

As to the origin of our Institution, though we believe that Cain and the builders of his city were strangers to its mysteries, and that when the iniquities of men brought an awful visitation on an iniquitous world, only four Masons were saved from that universal deluge; one of these even, the second son of Noah, was not Master of his Art, for by his unfilial and undutiful conduct, he brought on himself the maledictions of his insulted and justly incensed parent. That neither Nimrod nor any of his bricklayers, nor any one connected with the Tower of Babel, knew anything of the matter, and also that there are some hundreds mentioned in the histories of Freemasonry under the titles of Grand Masters and so forth, for no other reason than that of giving orders for the building of a Castle, Tower, House or some other Edifice, or for permitting the Freemasons to erect such on their lands or territories, while the memories of as many thousands

faithful, true Craftsmen are buried in oblivion; though we know all this to be the case, yet as Freemasons we believe the Institution to be coeval with mankind. Some people, however, not having had the honor of being initiated, have thought fit to question the accuracy of our Chronological statement, and with an air of ridicule, ask, Where was the Institution prior to the building of King Solomon's Temple? while others refer it to far later periods; but, after all, perhaps, it is not a point about which there is any necessity of being too curiously inquisitive, if the Institution confers benefits, are we not to avail ourselves of these benefits because we cannot ascertain the precise time when they began to flow in upon us? Would not any man be reckoned devoid of sense and reason who would act in a similar manner in the ordinary affairs of life.

If the Institution inculcated anything prejudicial to the interests of society in general, or to those of its members in particular, then indeed it would be the positive duty of every man to avoid having any connection with it whatsoever; but if, on the contrary, it be allowed (I may almost say) universally allowed to be admirably framed for the benefit of all, then, as it would be the greatest absurdity in man to reject it, so it would be inconsistent with the wisdom of that divine nature which does nothing in vain, to condescend to give us such proof of its origin as we would unreasonably require, for demonstration is superfluous where probability is sufficient; moreover, when we consider that it was not framed by the Legislature of any particular country, nor established in the enlightened times of scientific knowledge, but, on the contrary, in times of comparative ignorance when mankind were not prepared to comprehend fully the extent of its utility and advantages, and that it was not brought in by the arm of power, nor supported by authority, but of itself made its way in direct opposition to the prejudices and passions of mortals; when all the circumstances, I say, are duly considered, the natural conclusion is that everyone, judging impartially, will unhesitatingly admit that its origin must be attributed to something more than human agency; but, how various and discordant soever the opinions may be which some entertain on this point, we Freemasons unanimously agree in believing that the Institution is coeval with mankind; and, indeed, we very justly come to this conclusion, for man was no sooner formed and dignified with a ray of the Divinity, than that light directed him to admire, contemplate, and endeavor to imitate the grand and stupendous works of his Omnipotent Creator and to copy his great exemplar into every infant Art, but the celestial beam with which the faculties of man was originally illumined, was soon deplorably obscured, dimmed and weakened by his first disobedience, and then we find the much needed aid of Divine instruction benignly vouchsafed in the Institution of Naval Architecture by the building of the Ark, which served as a model to succeeding

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generations, and the same heavenly oracle dictated the construction of the Ark of the Covenant with its protecting Tabernacle in the wilderness; and, in process of time, the magnificence of King Solomon's Temple, the pattern of Military Architecture.

Now, leaving holy ground and resigning the operative branch of the system to the discussion of those who, from the peculiar bias of their minds, or their connection with the Arts, have made it more immediately the object of their studies. The Institution, at least in its speculative form, may be traced among the Eastern Magi and in the renowned learning of Egypt from whence taking a westerly course like other Sciences, it was brought by that European Apostle of Masonry Pythagoras, from whose propagation it is supposed to have reached the British Isles, and from thence, in all probability, was introduced into this vast and mighty Continent. Thus it diffused the light of Science to the remotest parts of the earth, marching like a benignant conqueror, from country to country, from nation to nation, and wherever it appeared darkness fled, for it proclaimed the mandate of its Omnipotent Grand Master, "Let there be light, and there was light;" it taught natural religion, morality, subordination, philosophy and the arts, on the banks of the Ganges, in the hieroglyphics of Egypt, in the Sanctuaries of Eleusis, in the schools of Sages, and in the caves of the Druids; but what improvement, if any, it received from the Magi of Persia or the learned Egyptians, or whether the silence imposed on the Disciples of Pythagoras was analogous to the taciturnity regarding its mysteries observed by the Craft towards all except the Ekλεκτοι or chosen, and how far it was observed or studied in Britain, and many other curious facts respecting it, I must decline enquiring into at present, and, therefore, will leave the investigation of them to Brethren of greater experience and ability. I trust, however, it will suffice to note that we are free, because no bondservant, nor the irreclaimable slave of sensual appetites is permitted among us, and accepted, seeing that we have stood the test of several probationary degrees, and are emulous of being found worthy of the illustrious badges worn by those who hold the first place there, where no Atheist nor profane or reprobate person, known to be such, can possibly gain admission. Another prominent and leading feature in our Institution is its permanency, and I doubt not but that it will appear to every reflecting mind a very singular fact, that, amidst the successful revolutions in Kingdoms, the numerous alterations in the forms of Government, and the countless changes in customs and laws, Freemasonry has descended from the earliest ages pure and unadulterated in its forms and principles, and has always remained intrinsically the same, that on it the effect of time, contrary to the natural course of things, has been to ameliorate not to impair it, to conduct it to perfection by improvements ad infinitum, not to accelerate its progress to decay.

Are we asked, To what is this its permanency attributed? I think we may reply, it is permanent because it has the Supreme Architect of the Universe as the object of its adoration and imitation, his august, sublime and wonderful works for its pattern and prototype, the wisest and best men of every age, nation and language, the first in point of rank, knowledge and moral excellence for its patrons and professors.

And it is permanent, because it is built, not on mutable and perishable circumstances of an exterior nature, but on the immutable and infallible word of Jehovah himself, and on the very best affections of the human heart; piety towards God the Master Builder, and universal philanthropy being the grand and immoveable pillars on which the strength of our noble structure is firmly established.

Let us then endeavor to imitate those many wise and exalted men who gloried in having been admitted to a knowledge of our art, and who exerted their powerful talents to transmit it to us pure and unadulterated as we now have the happiness to enjoy it; let us vie with them in setting honor on the Craft that we also may exert our faculties in transmitting it to posterity as pure as we have found it. Perhaps then the first step towards accomplishing this most desirable object would be to keep back from the door, as well as from the hall of Freemasonry, everything that is repugnant to its principles, consequently one of the most important duties incumbent on the members and especially on the officers of every Lodge, is to examine strictly into the characters and qualifications of those who solicit the honor and privilege of initiation, because an Accepted Mason is considered in all countries as a title of worth and probity, and who has a right to associate with gentlemen of the very highest rank; therefore, when a man obtains this privilege, he virtually gets a letter of introduction to a certain number of the most respectable characters to be found in the world. Ought, then, such an ample and valuable certificate be granted to any except those, who on the closest enquiry, are proved to be worthy of such pre-eminent distinction. Unless great attention be paid to this particular, not only the Lodge of admission itself may suffer in point of character, but also injustice may be done to the honor of the Craft in general, and Brethren, both at home and abroad, may be imposed on, who, trusting to such an attestation, give the right hand of Fellowship to men not only undeserving of their friendship, but even of being admitted to their company. This is one of those possible abuses of Masonry which cannot be too carefully guarded against; for, indeed, it is to be regretted that to the suggestions of some weak minds among our fraternity, the prejudices against our invaluable Institution are in some measure to be attributed, for some men, incapable of comprehending the beautiful allegories of our Ancient Order, ignorantly assert that its ceremonies are insignificant, and its doctrines inefficient; to

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this assertion their conduct gives a semblance of truth, since we fail to discern any change having taken place in them after their initiation.

Nature it is true, or rather God's nature, can alone implant the seeds of wisdom, but, we know also that Freemasonry can teach and enable us to cultivate the soil and foster and strengthen the plant in its growth, but the understanding of some incompetent to the conception of an idea so sublime as that of a society of men uniting for the noble purpose of acquiring and disseminating genuine knowledge and cementing the bonds of sincere friendship among themselves, incompetent, I say, to comprehend such an immense plan of perfection, the grosser faculties of some men induce them to conceive ideas of Freemasonry as of a superior degree of conviviality, and, assuming this fallacious principle, prevail, perhaps, on some inconsiderate Brother to propose their initiation; then, what has not that Brother to answer for who, so far forgetting our ancient charges, substitutes, it may be, the fruits of a club room acquaintance for the solid qualifications for Freemasonry? and thus degrades the dignity of that Order (character) which it has been the pride of the best men to assume and support, and what are the consequences of all this? The candidate, thus unworthily introduced, experiences a disagreeable tedium during the business of the lodge and flies from it with rapture to some entertainment more congenial to his tastes; then, from such attendance on the duties of Masonry, what impression can be made but that of stupid wonder at its mysterious and, to him, incomprehensible pursuits; from which, gratifying as they are to other minds, he can derive no pleasure; this impression he bears abroad with him into the world, and, if consulted by some well-disposed person as to the propriety of becoming a Freemason or not, he blunders out his ridiculous conceptions of the Institution, and debases, through ignorance of its value, "A pearl beyond price."

Too much praise therefore cannot be bestowed on the Members of those Lodges in which the Officers are invariably selected from those who are distinguished for their respectability, worth and Masonic experience, for it is well known that the rules of a society will be more or less strictly observed according to the degree of dignity and respect he possesses who presides over it. Every society for whatsoever purpose it may be designed, takes its colour in some measure from its Master or President, as it is part of his office to give admonitions to others, as well as to exemplify the fixed rules and standing regulations of the Society, and, in fact, the spirit of the Master is, to a certain extent, infused into those whom he directs. Now in a mixed society like ours, three things are more immediately necessary for the existence of true friendship, viz: condescension to inferiors, a becoming respect to superiors, and the power of secrecy. We have it stated by a great authority that "he who reveals

secrets separates chiefest friends." As to the equality established among Freemasons, it is only a temporary and voluntary condescension on the part of superiors during the business of the Lodge, for the laudable purpose of promoting the grand principle of the Order, viz., Brotherly love. When the Lodge is closed each man resumes his proper rank and station, and honor is paid to whom it is due; nor even when the lodge is open does this condescension of superiors subject them to that kind of familiarity which is apt to produce contempt, if that were the case it would excite feelings which would operate to detach them from our fellowship; instead of which a cordial union in works calculated to promote mutual enjoyment, by the exercise of the most benevolent principles, is the influence under which we meet and for this purpose we find that rank, while it gives power, never destroys inclination. At the same time we should never forget that every Freemason, without distinction of the profession of his faith, of whatever country or position in life he may be, the moment he offers us his right hand as the emblem of Brotherly confidence, has a sacred claim on our friendship, for we know that equality was the first lot of nature, though it was soon swerved from.

The Freemason restores the original rights of man, he never sacrifices to vulgar prejudices the sacred plumb-rule among us, puts all ranks on a level; nevertheless, we honor the distinctions in civil life which the laws of society have introduced or permitted. These gradations, we know, it must be allowed, are often the productions of false pride, but pride it would be in us to struggle against or disavow them since civil society acknowledges them; but in our meetings we step behind the man who is more enlightened, let his position in life be what it may, for the dignity which distinguishes a man in the world is not taken into consideration in the Lodge; and, as the Freemason has a chartered right to rank, the most exalted in our fraternity do not hesitate to recognize out of Lodge, an humble but honest man whom a little before they acknowledged as a brother. If any were guilty of such unbecoming misdemeanor, the Order then would not recognize them, but would be ashamed of them and send them back to the profane theatre of the world there to exercise their pride and vanity.

Thus W. S. and B., we see that our Institution can acquire its proper place in the scale of benevolent societies only by a faithful observance of its own precepts, and these are to be found only in our first great and holy light. While then, we diligently search the Scriptures for the Secrets of our Art, and while we endeavor to understand the covenant, signs and tokens which subsisted between the King of Judah and the King of Tyre, I trust the spirit of the "widow's son," will be in us, filling us with a knowledge of all those points on which our whole system turns, viz., wisdom to design, strength to execute, and beauty, even the

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beauty of Holiness, to adorn; then, indeed, we may lay hold on the left pillar in the Temple whereby we shall find strength, and also fairly rest on the right, a still higher column in our scientific line, one of solid frame and spiritual wealth by which we will be established; then we will be enabled to hold up our heads, "when justice is laid to the line, and righteousness to the plummet." Here allow me to remark that forms and ceremonies are necessary to the being and preservation of any great undertaking, especially if they produce a regard to the spirit or principle of the Institution itself. We use them, therefore, as the means whereby we feel the power of the moral and beneficial influence of the Order; and, for the same reason, we study carefully the meaning of the Hieroglyphics and emblems which the Institution lays before us.

Having now alluded to these emblems I beg leave to trespass on your patience for a very few moments, while, with all possible brevity, I endeavor to show that the first degrees in Masonry seem to have a very apt and obvious coincidence with the three progressive states of man from the creation to the end of time—the first being emblematical of man's state by nature from his first disobedience to the time of God's covenant with Abraham and the establishment of the Jewish Economy; the second, from that period, the era of the last and perfect revelation from heaven to man on earth made by the great Redeemer; the third comprehending the glorious interval of the Christian Dispensation down to the consummation of all things.

The state of darkness or obscurity then of the first degree strongly figures out the darkness of chaos before man's creation as it does also the night of more than Egyptian darkness in which his noble faculties were plunged by the fall consequent on his original transgression; it is also forcibly emblematical of the darkness of the womb antecedent to man's natural birth and the pain or torture inflicted on his entrance in the order aptly represent his pangs and bitter sensations on his entrance into Lodge of this chequered life.

Like a woful and benighted traveller found in some dreary hopeless desert, his indigent situation suggests to him the forlorn helpless condition of man in a state of nature, teaches him the value of mutual good offices, and directs him to extend afterwards to others that relief of which he himself then stands so much in need, by comforting the afflicted, feeding the hungry, and covering the naked with a garment. He is brought to the light of the world and also to the light of knowledge by the help of others. His investiture is strongly significant of the first clothing of the human race, and marks out the modest purpose of primeval dress. His tools are the mere implements of uninstructed genius, and the rude emblems of the simplest moral truths, pointing out the hard labour which human industry must undergo when unassisted by the

cunning and compendious devices of cultivated art. His Lodge is described to him as an universal wilderness, wherein he cautiously associates with his brethren on the highest hills or in the lowest valleys, the green grass its pavement and the cloudy canopy of heaven its covering. Thus he is taught to consider this whole terrestrial globe as his Lodge, and is thereby instructed to look upon all mankind as brethren, and to grasp the whole human race to his breast with the arms of universal benevolence and compassion. Hence also he learns to view the whole earth as one Temple to the ever living God, with its length due east and west marked out by the line of the zodiac, with the great course of the sun and moon therein, and to contemplate every human heart as an altar burning with the incense of adoration to the Supreme Omnipotent Architect of the Universe.

In the next place, as the darkness of natural religion preceded the Divine revelation vouchsafed to the favourite people of God, so by initiation into the second degree we advance still farther into the dawn figured out by the Mosaic dispensation which preceded the perfect Christian day. Here the novitiate is brought to light, to behold and handle tools of a more artificial and ingenious construction, and emblematic of sublimer moral truths. By these he learns to reduce rude matter into due form, and rude matters into the more polished shape of moral rectitude, thereby becoming himself a more harmonious corner stone of symmetry in the structure of human society until he is made a glorious corner stone in the temple of God, not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens. Now he learns to apply the square of justice to all his actions, the level of equality, humility and benevolence to all his brother men; and by the plumbline of fortitude to support himself amid all the trials and difficulties of this our fallen, feeble nature; and now, instead of the casual Lodge as heretofore, like the vagrant Tabernacle in the wilderness, he becomes acquainted with the construction of the glorious Temple of King Solomon, whose magnificent proportions were dictated by the oracular instructions of God himself, and were figurative of celestial perfection.

The third degree brings the Masonic enquirer to a state representing the meridian light of last and fullest revelation from Heaven to man on earth, made by the eternal Son of God, through whose resurrection and ascension he is raised from darkness and death to a certainty of life and immortality.

Such is a synopsis (but a very imperfect one, I confess), of the Masonic Economy; such are the faint outlines of that system which has justly been compared to an equilateral triangle, the perfect emblem of universal harmony, and a most sublime symbol of the incomprehensible Deity.

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hast thou reconciled the jarring interests, and converted the fiercest foes to dearest friends: therefore, brethren, let us pursue our time-revered, honored art with alacrity and firmness, each moving on the square of truth by the compass of God's word, according to our respective stations, in all the rules of symmetry, order, and proportion; and let us not entertain any fear when our earthly Lodge shall be dissolved, for our Jewels will still be safe, and we shall be admitted to a more glorious Lodge, even a heavenly one, where Angels and Saints will be our Fellow Crafts and Companions, and the Omnipotent Architect of the Universe our ineffably great and glorious Grand Master, our light, our life, our joy, our all. So mote it be.

FINIS.

